The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Thursday, November 30, 1978 7A

# Lane Offered Payoff, King's Driver Claims

Solomon Jones Jr., chauffeur for the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said yesterday that attorney Mark Lane offered him $1,000 to say the FBI had harassed King and might even have set up the plot to kill him.

Jones, who was one of the last persons to talk to King before he fell dead of an assassin's bullet in 1968, said he told Lane he knew nothing of such allegations and refused the money.

Lane is the attorney for James Earl Ray, convicted killer of the civil rights leader.

Lane strongly denied the accusation last night. He said the only time he had met Jones in the jail was in the presence of lawyer Duncan Ragsdale and no such offer was made.

"Either the reporter (who talked to Jones) is a liar or Solomon Jones is a liar," said Lane.

Ragsdale, who ran unsuccessfully against Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis earlier this month, last night disputed the charge by Jones.

"That's not true at all. Nothing like that was said. There was never any discussion of money or of Mr. Lane serving as an attorney for Jones. I frankly cannot believe that Mr. Jones made those remarks.

"If he did, it was only because of tremendous pressures brought to bear on him by either the FBI, the local district attorney general's office, or both.

"I have always found Mr. Jones to be straightforward in his dealings with me."

In a typed statement, Jones said Lane made the offer a month ago when he went to see Jones in the Shelby County Jail, where the ex-chauffeur is serving a one-year sentence for embezzlement.

The 40-year-old Jones said he told two FBI agents about Lane's visit yesterday. In a four-page statement, Jones said:

"Lane opened the interview by asking, 'Would you take $1,000 to put some hot news on the front page?'

"I asked, 'What kind of news?'

"Lane said, 'You know the FBI was harassing Dr. King.'

"I said, 'No, I don't know. Dr. King had personal business. I was Dr. King's driver.'

"Lane asked, 'Don't you think the FBI set up the plot to kill Dr. King?'

"I said, 'I don't know who set up the plot and I don't know who killed him.'

"Lane said, 'I'm going to get you before the committee (investigating the King case), and I want you to tell the committee that Walter Fauntroy (a civil rights worker now serving as the District of Columbia's nonvoting delegate in Congress) and Dr. King had women living at the Lorraine Motel. Was that true?'

"I answered, 'I don't know whether that was true.'"

"Lane stated, 'The man you described running from the scene dressed in something white — don't you think it was the FBI?'

"I said, 'I don't know who it was.'

Jones, who has been in the Shelby County Jail for about a month, said FBI agents talked to him Tuesday and Wednesday about the case. He said the agents told him they wanted to protect him.

Jones, who has been working for a bonding company since King's death, said he believes Lane wanted him to testify before the investigating committee (the House Select Committee on Assassinations), provided he said the FBI helped kill King. Otherwise, he said, Lane didn't want him to testify.

The day after he spoke with Lane, Jones said a news release came out in which Lane supposedly claimed that Jones was "a key witness to the killing of Dr. King and that the assassination committee would not let (Jones) testify because the testimony would destroy the committee."

In his statement yesterday, Jones vigorously denied that he ever asked Lane to act as his attorney. He said:

"Lane is not now, has never been and will never be retained as an attorney by me."

Ragsdale said that he had not sought out Jones, but was approached by Jones' attorneys about two months ago.

"I was approached a couple of months ago by Jones' lawyers who said that I should talk to him because he had an interesting story to tell.

"Lane and I went to the Shelby County Jail where — after some haggling — we were allowed to talk with Jones in an interview room. There was never any discussion of any money. None whatsoever. Jones was concerned that he still has a case pending which he hopes to plea bargain with the district attorney general and he expressed concern that his federal parole might somehow be revoked so that he would have to return to federal prison."